2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
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CHAPTER VII

MARRIAGE

538 581 IN the Lawkanidi, the book of proverbs relating to ordinary life, it is said that monks and hermits are beautiful when they are lean; four-footed animals when they are fat; men when they are learned; and women when they are married. This recommendation to the married state is no more needed by Burmese maidens than it is by their sisters in other parts of the world, and they have the further inducement that they enjoy a much freer and happier position than in any other Eastern country, and in some respects are better off even than women in England. All the money and possessions which a girl brings with her on marriage are kept carefully separate for the benefit of her children or heirs, and she carries her property away with her if she is divorced, besides anything she may have added to it in the interim by her own trading or by inheritance. Thus a married Burmese woman is much more independent than any European even in the most advanced states. In the eyes of the Dammathat the old idea of the *patria potestas* prevails indeed, and woman is regarded as a simple chattel, belonging entirely to her parents, and to be disposed of by them without any reference to her personal inclinations; but, as a matter of fact, she may do pretty well as she pleases, may marry the youth on whom she has fixed her affections, and may separate herself from the husband who has offended her, by going before the village elders and stating her case; and if the complaint is just, her request is never refused.

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As yet they have not begun to demand an equal share

16:Fielding Hall G-3 (1885-1890) 1898 AP1 Burma
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marriage, which is with most people a ceremony performed in full daylight with all accessories of display, is with the Burmese generally a secret. Two or three friends, perhaps, will be called quietly to the house, and the man and the woman will eat together, and thus become husband and wife. Then they will separate again, and not for several days, or even weeks perhaps, will it be known that they are married; for it is seldom that they can set up house for themselves just at once. Often they will marry and live apart for a time with their parents. Sometimes they will go and live together with the man's parents, but more usually with the girl's mother. Then after a time, when they have by their exertions made a little money, they build a house and go to live there; but sometimes they will live on with the girl's parents for years.

A girl does not change her name when she marries, nor does she wear any sign of marriage, such as a ring. Her name is always the same, and there is nothing to a stranger to denote whether she be married or not, or whose wife she is; and she keeps her property as her own. Marriage does not confer upon the husband any power over his wife's property, either what she brings with her, what she earns, or what she inherits subsequently; it all remains her own, as does his remain his own. But usually property acquired after marriage is held jointly. You will inquire, for instance, who is the owner of this garden, and be told Maung Han, Ma Shwè, the former being the husband's name and the latter the wife's. Both names are used very frequently in business and in legal proceedings, and indeed it is

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usual for both husband and wife to sign all deeds they may have occasion to execute. Nothing more free than a woman's position in the marriage state can be imagined. By law she is absolutely the mistress of her own property and her own self; and if it usually happens that the husband is the head of the house, that is because his nature gives him that position, not any law.

With us marriage means to a girl an utter breaking of her old ties, the beginning of a new life, of new duties, of new responsibilities. She goes out into a new and unknown world, full of strange facts, leaving one dependence for another, the shelter of a father for the shelter of a husband. She has even lost her own name, and becomes known but as the mistress of her husband; her soul is merged in his. But in Burma it is not so at all. She is still herself, still mistress of herself, an equal partner for life.

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I have said that the Burmese have no ideals, and this is true; but in the Laws of Manu there are laid down some of the requisite qualities for a perfect wife. There are seven kinds of wife, say the Laws of Manu: a wife like a thief, like an enemy, like a master, like a friend, like a sister, like a mother, like a slave. The last four of these are good, but the last is the best, and these are some of her qualities:

'She should fan and soothe her master to sleep, and sit by him near the bed on which he lies. She will fear and watch lest anything should disturb him. Every noise will be a terror to her; the hum of a mosquito as the blast of a trumpet; the fall of a leaf without will sound as loud as thunder. Even she

also used to do this. Sometimes they are able to extract about 5 viss of oil each in one day. 226 463 621

"There are also cultivators in the village. Some of those who work INS also own fields. They rent out the land to tenants. There are altogether 12 people in our village who own cultivation fields. But the biggest landowner does not own lands more extensive than three hundred acres. Some own 40 or 50 acres. Some engage cultivators and work their fields themselves, while others rent out the fields for a certain percentage of the produce. 421 463 621 427

"There were paid workers in the IN. They were paid, not a daily wage, but a monthly salary of Rs. 30/- without food. About 50 of the 80 workers were paid workers, though some of them owned shares as well. In addition to their pay, these paid workers received quite a lot of fish which their families went around selling. They get one or two basket-loads of fish to sell, and in this way make quite a lot of money. 226 463 465

"Fish is not distributed in this manner every day - only when the fish start coming down in great numbers. On these occasions however the workers get about 25 to 30 viss each - that is, by the boatload. Ordinarily they are given just enough for one meal.

"I also own eleven cows; eight for loaning out to cultivators and three for breeding purposes. No milk is drawn for human consumption because that is not the custom in our native place." 231 [272]

One yoke of oxen hired out brought U Myaing 50 baskets of paddy a year. He had 4 yokes. They kept by 100 baskets for home consumption and sold the rest at a rate fluctuating between Rs. 100/- and Rs. 175/- per hundred baskets.

In those years when U Myaing works at INS, he has to confine himself to such work only. During those years when he does not work at INS, he buys the fish from IN workers and process them for sale as NGAGYI, NGA-CHAUK, etc. Each year he uses between four to five thousand fish. When U Myain his co-workers could not get an IN, he had to buy fish and make NGA-CHAUK, (dried fish), NGAPI and NGANPYAR-YE. 226 463 433

On his former visits to Rangoon U Myaing came in a boat loaded with NGAGYI CHAUK (dried NGA GYI) and transferred it to the care of a broker in Rangoon. He then ascended the Shwe Dagon pagoda platform, donated money and water, returned to the broker, and went around the town to places like Mogul Street (the Indian quarter) for meats and ate pillau-rice etc. It took three or four days, and sometimes about ten days for the broker to dispose of his goods and in this time he would go round all the pagodas in Rangoon like the Botataung, Sule, Nga-htut-gyi etc. Once he went to a Chinese hotel known as the KAM-HIN hotel together with some traders from DABUYIU. They pooled the expenses. The journey home took a day and a night. He took back with him clothes, longyis, KINGYIS, durian fruit, 226 438 484 [778]